

## OBITUARY

### Bishop Skat Hoffmeyer, Denmark

By OVE HOEGH-GULDBERG\*

It was originally intended that Baron Charles de Worms who was a close friend of the late bishop, should write this obituary. When he himself died only a few weeks later, the editor asked me to undertake the task.

Dr. Skat Hoffmeyer was born in Copenhagen on 7th-December, 1891, and passed away on 31st August, 1979, almost 88 years old. He spent his working life in Jutland, originally as vicar at Raarup, then as archdeacon at Aarhus before becoming bishop there from 1940 to 1961.

It is remarkable that a life so full of quite different and demanding work should leave much time for the study and collection of butterflies and flowers. However, his ability, energy and interests were such already as a boy that his parents gave him books on butterflies for his tenth birthday, and at the age of 15 he caught the first *Peribatodes manuelaria* Herrich-Schaeffer in Denmark, a most remarkable catch.

His huge collection of Danish Heterocera (Macrolepidoptera) thus covers a period of over 70 years. It contains specimens from every region of Denmark and was prepared with a unique precision and sense of beauty.

Butterfly collecting changed enormously during those years: before World War I he had to make do with a bicycle lamp with a small candle inside for his nightly expeditions. Then came kerosene stable lamps, carbide bicycle lights, and Petromaxes before the mercury quartz lamp was finally introduced. Similarly, he had to go by bicycle or train when he was young, before graduating to motor bikes and cars. Originally, people collected in isolation and there was little communication among collectors; nowadays in Denmark alone there are five associations with hundreds of members exchanging experiences and information among collectors; nowadays in Denmark alone there are five associations with hundreds of members exchanging experiences and information.

Skat Hoffmeyer spoke all main modern and classic European languages and quickly established contact with leading lepidopterists. Britain was particularly close to his heart. His contacts here included P. M. Allen, E. A. Cockayne, D. S. Fletcher, L. T. Ford, A. L. Goodson, J. W. Heslop Harrison, I. R. P. Heslop, S. N. A. Jacobs, A. Russell, W. H. T. Tams, M. Tweedie, and C. de Worms, not to mention Richard South whose books were a model for Skat Hoffmeyer's own publications.

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His European connections and his extensive knowledge of the literature enabled him to predict the discovery of new species in Denmark; he himself found many of these on the basis of his knowledge of their biology. He shared his knowledge with others through almost 100\*\* published papers, dealing with faunistics, subspecific problems, sibling species, melanism, ecology, and biology. With his close friend Sigfred Knudsen he wrote the major faunistic work, "De danske storsommerfugle og deres udbredelse i Nordsø-Ostersøomraadet" (Danish Macrolepidoptera and Their Distribution in the North Sea-Baltic Areas).

His special fields of interest included *Zygaena diaphana* Staudinger (ssp. *hoffmeyeri* Reiss), *Amphipoea crinanensis* (ssp. *jutlandica* Hoffmeyer & Knudsen), and *Heliothis maritima* Graslin ssp. *septentrionalis* Hoffmeyer.

His knowledge was finally gathered in three works, "De danske spindere" (Bombycids, 1948), "De danske uglere" (Noctuids, 1949), and "De danske maalere" (Geometrids, 1952). These books contain more than a thousand pages of text as well as many illustrations including excellent colour photographs of every species and numerous varieties. They have been reprinted several times.

His object was to give a self-contained and concise description of each Danish species, and he succeeded in this task in such a captivating manner and covering the subject so completely that these books have become the "bible" of Danish collectors. I believe that if they were translated, updated, and suitably adapted they would become equally significant in Britain. The bishop was proud when of all people an Englishman, Michael Tweedie, taught himself Danish in order to read these books.

Skat Hoffmeyer was a co-founder of the Entomologists' Club in Aarhus. The club elected him a Life Member, an honour which was also accorded him by the Danish Lepidopterist Association and the Natural History Association of Jutland. The recently established Natural History Museum in Aarhus owes him much: he was a Director and he founded its butterfly collections which includes thousands of genital specimens prepared by him. Finally he donated his own collection to the museum.

Butterflies were always close to his thinking. Once when he led a procession of clergymen in full regalia across a churchyard, he is said to have broken ranks when he suddenly caught sight of the "humming-bird hawk moth"; he had his net hidden under his robes!

Such was his way, full of fun, often ironical, enormously knowledgeable, ever helpful and interested.

He was the doyen of Danish lepidopterists; we will all miss him.

\*\* For a complete bibliography of Dr. Skat Hoffmeyer's works on lepidoptera, see "Flora og Fauna" 1979, p. 90.